DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 550 EC 111 951

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TITLE Social Learning Based System for Parent Training.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the World Congress on Future Special Education (First, Stirling, Scotland, June 25 - July 1, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Change; *Behavior Problems; *Change Strategies; *Learning Theories; Operant Conditioning; *Parent Education; Parent Responsibility; *Training Techniques

ABSTRACT

The effective use of parents as behavior change agents in the modification of their children's behavior is discussed. Identified are four parent training steps: (1) parents learn to identify and record specific behaviors: (2) parents learn through consultation and reading how to effect behavior change: (3) parents count behaviors, note behavioral consequences, and specify a member of the family to deliver the consequence; and (4) parents collect data and learn how to maintain the changed behavior. Two case studies demonstrate the use of these steps in effecting behavior change. It is noted that parent training in small groups is more effective and efficient than individual parent training. Home settings for the parent training programs are seen to be more advantageous because this is where the behaviors occur and where the change is expected. (PHR)

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Abstract

Social learning theory has been applied to training parents various management and interaction skills. Various settings have been used for these parent training sessions. This paper attempts to deal with the specifics of the social learning based system for parent training. Specific case studies also are included.

Running Head - Parent Education

Parent Training

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Social Learning Based System for Parent Training

Various theoretical approaches have been employed in working with parents and children regarding home related problems. Research using the psychoanalytic approach ranges from the parent as an observer to principal therapeutic agent. (e.g., for modeling of the professional -- Elkisch, 1935; Furman, 1957; for direct therapeutic role -- Freud, 1909; Kubie, 1937) Researchers using social learning theory principles have involved parents in the direct application of behavior change strategies. (e.g., using parents or social reinforcers -- Hawkins, Peterson, Schmeid, and Bijou, 1966; controlling reinforcement by family members -- Becker, 1974; Patterson, Ray and Shaw, 1968; Walder, Cohen and Breiter, 1969)

Recent research suggests that a number of questions remain regarding the effectiveness of psychoanalytic-psychotherapy approaches (Levitt, 1957, 1963; Hood-Williams, 1960; Richman, 1971). Simultaneously, social learning principles being used suggested that alternative interventions were as effective as psychoanalysis-psychotherapy (Ayllon, and Michael, 1959; Wolf, Risley and Mees, 1964; Ferester, 1962). This paper attempts to analyze those social learning based variables involved in parent training and provide an outline for the development of parent training programs using the social learning system.

Analysis of the Social Learning System

Hawkins et al. (1966) were among the first researchers to apply the principles of social learning theory to parent training. Patterson et al. have further extended the use of social learning theory principles with parents (Patterson, Ray and Shaw, 1968). Patterson's (1975) training methods involve a four-step program

which lasts from five to fifteen weeks. Specific steps in the system are listed below.

> Parents are involved in collecting baseline data on a specific set of behaviors. Parents are assigned to read a set of materials on behavioral analysis and child management during this period of time.
>
> Instructions, then, are provided to parents regarding procedures for counting and graphing target behaviors.
>
> Parents are instructed to count the behaviors, noting the behavioral consequences, and specifying a member of the family to deliver the consequences.
>
> Further assistance is provided to parents on altering reinforcement contingencies through supervision of the parents.

Interestingly, Walder and his associates (Walder, Cohen and Breiter, 1969) outlined three specific approaches to training parents in the use of behavioral applications. The three approaches to parent training discussed included educational groups, individual consultations, and controlled learning environments in homes. Walder et al. believe that the purpose of the educational groups is to teach parents general principles of learning theory. They, also, specify a four step program similar to Patterson's program.

> The first phase of systems, which takes about four weeks, involves parents in identifying and recording behavior.
>
> Individual consultations for the purpose of analyzing antecedent, behaviors, and consequent events in changing the child's behavior is conducted during the second phase. This phase of the program usually lasts for about two weeks.
>
> The third phase of the system, which is designed to last approximately eight weeks, instructs the parents in procedures of shaping new behavior.
>
> Phase four, which lasts about two weeks, is a review of the principles of behavior and data collected in the homes.

This system for training parents combines both the group and individual

approaches. The controlled learning environment also could be employed. This procedure calls for a professional to go into the home at specified periods of time to record parents' attempts at carrying out intervention plans. Parents are taught the same basic principles in both the educational group and controlled group settings. In the controlled learning environment, the observer provides feedback on the parents' behavior, and further guides their actions. The observers presence slowly is phased out of the program. The goal of the program is to produce new appropriate parent-child behaviors which can be carried out without the observers' presence.

Effecting behavioral change in parental environment seems to be most advantageous. Parents can be trained to control the problems in the family setting; thus, reducing the chances of problems occurring among other family members. Parents are reinforced for successfully managing problem situations. The restricting of problem behavior can be carried out directly by the parent. Also, parents are the ones who live with the situation daily. Therefore, it seems logical that the disturbing behavior should be changed and maintained within the home environment.

Social Learning System - Case Studies

Economically, the training of parents as change agents results in a more efficient use of professional time. Miller (1975) believes that training of non-professionals to implement behavior change strategies in various environmental settings should be a high priority item for the professional. For sometime, professionals have been trained to conduct specific behavior change strategies.

(Cooper, J. O. and Edge, D., 1978). The following case studies of Susie and Tommy illustrate the steps and skills demonstrated by non-professionals in effecting and maintaining behavior change.

Susie

Susie, a ten year old legally blind girl, attends a residental school for blind children. Susie is considered to be of average intelligence, and functions visually, using large print materials. During the months that school is in session, she lives in the dormitory with eight other girls, ages six through eleven. Two women alternate as cottage-parents for this group of girls.

For the two years that Susie has been attending this residential school, she always had been difficult to get out of bed. The cottage-parents decided to analyze the behavior and initiate a behavior change program. Upon baselining the behavior, it was discovered that Susie had to be called an average of four (4) times each morning before she would get out of bed. After analyzing the baseline data, the cottage-parents, with the help of Susie, devised an intervention plan.

Each morning that Susie rose out of bed without having to be called more than once, she would earn a special privilege agreed upon earlier by Susie and the cottage-parents. Beginning on the first morning of the intervention period, Susie was up when the lights came on without having to be called. A record was maintained on her getting-up behavior for five consecutive weeks. Susie's problem of getting out of bed in the mornings was eliminated.

The behavior of the cottage-parents also changed. The success with changing this behavior resulted in the cottage-parents contracting with other children to change certain behaviors.

Tommy

Tommy, a nine year old male, attends a classroom for children with specific learning disabilities in the public schools. Tommy is more active than other children in his classroom, and he often gets into fights. When he is home, his parents are constantly after him to slow down, and stop fighting his younger brother.

Recently, Tommy had been becoming more of a problem than his parents could stand. The family decided to do something about the behavior. Tommy's parents were not sure of all the behaviors they wanted to see changed so they conducted an analysis of a number of behaviors. They decided that the fighting behavior seemed to be the one that got everyone upset. Upon identifying this behavior, the parents began to take baseline data during a specified time period in the evening. After analyzing the baseline data, the parents devised an intervention plan.

The parents decided that Tommy hated to be by himself. Therefore, each time Tommy initiated a fight with his younger brother, Tommy would be placed in the bathroom for a short period of time. The parents observed Tommy's behavior, and on the first evening Tommy got into a fight with his brother. Tommy's parents told him what was going to happen and carried through with the plan. Tommy yelled and screamed for about three minutes, and his parents told him that for each minute he yelled and screamed that he would have to stay two minutes longer. For the reminder of the first evening Tommy did not engage in any fighting behavior. Over the next seven weeks, Tommy initiated only two other fights.

Tommy's parents were well pleased with their success. Also, they noticed that tension seemed to be reduced between the two of them during this period of time. They felt that they were happier.

Positive and Negative Variables of the System

Instructing parents in principles of social learning theory have occurred through both small group and individual sessions. Programmed materials also have been provided to parents for instructional purposes. Various communication systems have been devised for instructing parents on the principles of effecting behavior change in children.

Miller (1975) in analyzing the methods of small group and individual instruction, found that both were equally effective in training parents in the specific skills. However, one of the disadvantages of the individual method is the amount of time required for training the parents. Also, it seems to be advantageous for parents to interact on problem solving methods and case illustrations.

Parent training programs have been conducted in clinics, clinic-home and home settings (Fink, A., Edge, D., and Tilly, R., 1978). In considering the location for parent training programs, the purpose of the training should be carefully analyzed. Although, success has been demonstrated in clinical settings, caution should be noted regarding the generalization of behaviors outside the particular environment in which the training occurred (O'Leary, O'Leary and Becker, 1967). Training may occur in either of these settings, but caution should be warranted in the transfer of behaviors of any of the settings in which training did not occur.

Home settings provide a number of advantages. First, the parents are able to function efficiently within their own environment. Second, the home environment is the place where behavior change is expected and can be controlled by the family members. Third, after behavior change occurs, parents are more likely

to maintain the child's behavior if the training environment is the same. Parents have been found to be very successful in implementing the social learning based system. Research seems to highly support the premise that social learning theory principles can be used by parents in the home setting (Cooper, J. O., and Edge, D., 1978).

Summary

Generally, parents have been omitted from the active participation of effecting long term change in the behavior of their children. Parents have been expected to act as though they know everything about parenting and child rearing. But, when problems exist, parents are the first to be blamed. "Oh, have you heard this about this Jones boy? He always is fighting, and he just cannot get along at home." Parents who are concerned about their children's behavior are usually anxious to do something about it. Unfortunately, parents are not always aware of child management principles, and they may resort to one form of control, punishment.

Parent training programs have proved to be effective means of assisting parents and family members in learning the necessary principles of changing behavior. Various options are available to the parent in learning these vital skills. Most of all, parents can use the skills learned in parent training to effect change in the home setting long after the program ends.

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